

***A Future of Green Ramadan:
Representing Islamic Environmental Organizations in Contemporary Academic Literature***

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

In the political climate of the early 21st century, environmentalism and religious pluralism are two issues at the forefront of the cultural consciousness of the United States. As this is the case, a remarkable number of environmental organizations have sprung out of a variety of religious traditions in the past few decades. These organizations are engaged in a myriad of different environmental movements from the promotion of recycling and sustainable energy, to footprint reduction and community mobilization. Many of these organizations have been studied by scholars over the last 30 years, but a striking hole has been found in the literature: Islamic environmental organizations. This paper addresses the lack of research devoted to Islamic environmental organizations in the United States by exploring the studies conducted in the last 30 years while discussing the successes and shortcomings of each and contextualizing each study in the historical arc of this conversation. Next, this lack of representation and diversity is tackled by exploring why this issue is a moral imperative for our species as a whole. Finally, this paper explores some avenues for further research beginning with Green Muslims and the Islamic Society of North America.

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Process Analysis Statement

As a product of the Philosophy and Religious Studies department at Ball State and as a double major in both sides of the department, I hold research interest in both fields. This project was ultimately borne out of my love of both environmental ethics and Islamic studies—especially my love of local communities and the unique ways in which faith is practiced in everyday life.

During the spring semester of 2018, I had the wonderful and unique opportunity to take part in an immersive learning project through the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry. The project was called “Muslims in Muncie” and highlighted the local Muslim community’s founding and involvement in the larger Muncie community. As part of our research, we visited local Muslim communities around the country and met with regional and national organizations whose mission was to unite local mosques in the social and political spheres. In the end, we had over 40 hours of video interview footage of individuals in the Muncie Islamic community as well as an hour-long documentary about the history of the community. It was through this project that I became fascinated by local practices of faith and local community building. By merging this new-found interest with my continued interest in environmental issues, I decided to study local Muslim communities and larger Islamic organizations and how they each tackle environmental issues—specifically seeking out explicitly Islamic environmental organizations.

Of course, there were many angles I could have taken my own research. I had briefly tossed around the idea of doing my own in-depth analysis of a particular Islamic environmental organization by conducting interviews with the staff and membership, but unfortunately, that idea was beyond the realistic timeframe I had for this project. That idea is certainly something I would like to pursue in the future as a follow up to this paper, however, should the opportunity present itself. Eventually, after debating between a few other ideas and after doing more preliminary research, I decided to create a combination of a literature review and a philosophical call-to-action while also highlighting briefly some work being done by Islamic environmental organizations in the United States.

Once I had settled on a trajectory with which to proceed, I began my research by combing carefully through the current debates in the literature about religious approaches to the present environmental crises. I tracked the sources used by various scholars in the field which ultimately led me to other scholars and even more beyond them. There has been a plethora of research conducted in the last 30 years following the development and evolution of the environmental movement in the United States. Much of the research documented secular organizations and individuals not explicitly connected to religious communities. However, there is a sizeable proportion of the literature dedicated to those religious communities intimately involved in the environmental movement in the United States. As one might expect, given the massive majority of Christian communities in the United States, much of this documentation focused on Christian denominational differences to approaching the environmental crisis.

Unfortunately, yet expectedly, I found that the literature was remarkably sparse when it came to actual research conducted about Islamic environmental organizations in particular or Islamic organizations with a strong environmental leaning. This was the case across the board for all non-Christian religious communities. I was able to find some literature on Islamic environmental organizations in other countries, however, which provided a nice framework for which to argue for better representation for Islamic environmental organizations in the United States.

Bolstering my call-to-action, I utilized the work of David Harmon to argue for the support of diversity in academic research and expressed the fundamental existential need for our species to value diversity in all areas of our existence. This research functionally gives my project two distinct halves: one in which the present day literature is outlined and critiqued and the other in which I make my central argument that we need more and better research for the sake of ourselves, our societies, and our species. Ultimately, there is much work to be done in this area of study and this project merely sits at the threshold. Given more time, so much more could have been researched and addressed. Alas, I only had time for what is held in the following pages. My hope is that more time, dedication, and care will be taken by the academic community to accurately study these Islamic environmental organizations in the future. This work, in my opinion, is sorely needed. I hope this paper presents a point by which to jump forward into new, engaging, and fascinating avenues of study.

Setting the Stage

In 2017, the Pew Research Forum concluded and published a decade long study that began in 2007.¹ The purpose of this study was to analyze the changing religious dynamics in the United States over ten years as well as track the social and political attitudes of Americans alongside their religious beliefs.² The issues addressed in this survey were broad and gave the survey massive appeal to scholars in a variety of fields asking a myriad of complicated sociological and demographic questions. A major aspect of this survey which was and is of particular interest to me is the extensive data on religion in the United States—in the hundreds of pages of data published we find hundreds of new and important avenues to follow for future study and speculation. However, the subject of the highest interest to me is American Muslims and American expression of Islam—specifically how that demographic is changing over time.

In this regard, the Pew research is clear: not only is Islam the fastest growing religion in the world but it is also the fastest growing religion in the United States.³ Today, Christianity boasts an impressive 2.2 billion adherents—almost 35 percent of the entire global population. Islam comes in second in the line-up with 1.6 billion adherents—but growing sharply.⁴ In fact, it is projected that Islam will outgrow Christianity globally by the year 2050—in just over 30 years.⁵ In the United States, however, it's a similar but slightly different story. With Muslims only making up around 1 percent of all American citizens, it will take the Muslim population a

¹ Benjamin Wormald, "Religious Landscape Study," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. May 11, 2015. <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

² Benjamin Wormald, "About the Religious Landscape Study," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. May 11, 2015. <http://www.pewforum.org/about-the-religious-landscape-study/>.

³ Benjamin Wormald, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. April 02, 2015. <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

big longer to catch up. Pew projects that by the end of the 21st century, if growth rates remain the same, Muslims will be the religious majority in America (not including those who identify as “non-religious”).⁶

These projections have many implications, but a few that are directed related to my research outlined in this paper. First, the growth of a religious minority will open up new forms of expression for an already vibrant and diverse community, and second (and most important), Muslims in the United States are going to wield increasingly more influence on cultural, political, and economical issues in the coming decades. It is worth studying how the Islamic community in the United States has added and will add their own unique perspective on the social and political atmosphere and landscape of the United States as we prepare to enter the third decade of the 21st century. Naturally, the political dimension of life takes many forms—though none is more pressing, in my opinion, than the threat of global environmental disaster in the coming decades. In this paper, I will explore the current scholarly literature analyzing and discussing Islamic environmental organizations and the communities they represent in the United States. Unfortunately, there has been little work done in this area—with most research and study regarding environmental movements in the United States being heavily focused on Christian organizations or those organizations proclaiming Christian origins.

I will begin by exploring what work has already been done to bring Muslims and Islamic environmental organizations into the academic discourse. Then I will compare and contrast these approaches to Islamic organizations with those studies that focus on other religious traditions respective to environmental movements and organizations—highlighting the important

⁶ "The Changing Global Religious Landscape." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. April 05, 2017. <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>.

differences. Following this, I will explore the complexities of Islamic activism and the moral imperative we should feel toward representing these groups in the literature—specifically why this work and effort needs to occur immediately. Finally, I will outline a few important Islamic environmental organizations which are paving the way for future organizations to take up the mantle of an Islamic environmental ethic and praxis in the United States. To begin, we need to understand where the literature currently exists in contemporary scholarly circles.

Research As It Stands Today

In one of the earliest studies of religious environmental attitudes, authors Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt, and Green (GKSG) evaluated a survey from 1990 of various Christian organizations—groups not explicitly proclaiming a stance on environmentalism or environmental policy.⁷ The study surveyed individual opinions and attitudes toward various environmental beliefs and policies.⁸ Unfortunately, it lacked representation of any other religious perspective other than that of Christianity. However, while non-Christian religious organizations were absent from the study, there were 8 different and diverse Christian denominations represented in the study.⁹

The GKSG study stands as one of the first large-scale studies attempting to gauge American religious feelings on environmental issues—an enterprise that many other surveyors and researchers built off in later years. This study set the groundwork for more research to come in the wake of the 21st century's recognition that an environmental disaster is forthcoming or may already be underway. As important as this research was and still is, the lack of representation for

⁷ James L. Guth, Lyman A. Kellstedt, Corwin E. Smidt, and John C. Green, "Theological Perspectives and Environmentalism among Religious Activists," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32, no. 4 (12 1993): 373-382. doi:10.2307/1387177.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 376.

Islamic religious organizations is clear and problematic due to a fundamental assumption that the answer to the environmental crisis lay in the hands of a single religious trajectory. As we will explore later, this assumption is dangerous for not only our society as a whole but individuals as well.

Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, in their 2004 article "Death of Environmentalism," argue that modern environmentalism has begun to fail over the past few decades due to the movement's heavy reliance on issues-based environmentalism— especially in the American cultural context.¹⁰ Following in the footsteps of researchers in the mid to late 1990s, Angela M. Smith and Simone Pulver, in 2009, present Shellenberger and Nordhaus' article as the foundational starting point of their study.¹¹ For Smith and Pulver, issues-based environmentalism "is considered to be that which focuses very specifically on a certain environmental topic...and calls for actions to be taken."¹² This approach is highly devoted to tackling issues in the "scientific, technological, legal, and policy arenas" and as such is perceived as cold and detached from human emotion and human experience.¹³ To combat this, Smith and Pulver hypothesize that an ethics-based approach, especially one rooted in religious tradition and values, would work better by changing people's hearts and minds before becoming too dry.¹⁴

To test this hypothesis, Smith and Pulver conducted a study in which 42 "religious-environmental" organizations in the United States participated in a survey taken by their

¹⁰ Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, "Excerpts from "The Death of Environmentalism"," *Environment and Society*: 103-08.

¹¹ Angela Smith and Simone Pulver, "Ethics-Based Environmentalism in Practice: Religious-Environmental Organizations in the United States," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 13, no. 2 (06, 2009): 145-79.

¹² *Ibid.*, 146.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

members and leadership.¹⁵ From the beginning of their article, Smith and Pulver are clear that all previous studies into the behaviors and beliefs of religious-environmental groups have strictly focused on those which are Christian. The authors go on to state the following with reference to their work: "This article contributes to and extends the emerging body of scholarship on religious-environmental groups by broadening the range of organizations studied to include Jewish and interfaith groups."¹⁶ While this effort is laudable and certainly welcome, Smith and Pulver could have (and should have) easily included perspectives from other religious perspectives in the United States, particularly Islam. This is especially relevant as the most recent 2016 Pew study places the approximate number of Muslims in the United States at 3.45 million, only marginally smaller than the Jewish populace in the United States—at 4.2 million in 2013.¹⁷ It must be noted, however, that Smith and Pulver *do* acknowledge this particular shortcoming in the conclusion of their article.¹⁸

To select their participants, Smith and Pulver developed a 10-point list of criteria they either were or were not looking for. To qualify to be studied, an organization must

1) engage primarily in environmental work and provide a spiritual or religious rationale for this work; 2) be in existence for at least one year so that they had some time to organize themselves, establish a philosophy, complete a funding cycle, and begin their work; 3) maintain a website, as an indicator of a minimum level of institutionalization; 4) be headquartered in the United States and work primarily domestically; and 5) *be primarily of Jewish or Christian affiliation, or interfaith with Jewish and Christian membership*. Groups of other, non-Jewish or Christian affiliation constituted a very small fraction of the sample and were excluded on this basis. Groups excluded from the study were those that: 1) existed only as a website, since we wished to include only groups which interacted with people; 2) were a formal program housed within a particular religious denomination or movement, since the organization structures of such groups differed in

¹⁵ Angela Smith and Simone Pulver, "Ethics-Based Environmentalism in Practice: Religious-Environmental Organizations in the United States," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 13, no. 2 (06, 2009): 150.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ "The Changing Global Religious Landscape." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. April 05, 2017. <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>.

¹⁸ Angela Smith and Simone Pulver, "Ethics-Based Environmentalism in Practice: Religious-Environmental Organizations in the United States," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 13, no. 2 (06, 2009): 171.

important ways from those of independent groups. For example, formally affiliated groups received institutional support in a variety of ways—financial, staffing, etc.—that the independent groups did not; 3) conducted work solely within one congregation; 4) operated as a spirituality center...; 5) were created by a secular-environmental organization...; 6) were part of an educational institution (emphasis mine).¹⁹

It is interesting to note that the authors of this study explicitly wrote non-Judeo-Christian organization out of their acceptable research criteria. However, the language they use is slightly ambiguous when they talk about the “fraction of the sample” being too small.²⁰ Does this mean that they did find some Islamic groups but declined to invite them to participate because they were outnumbered by Judeo-Christian organizations? Unfortunately, the full list of participating organizations is not published alongside the study. If the list had been published, it would be important to notice just how many Jewish organizations were polled and studied. In one of Smith and Pulver’s appendices, they have included a single chart that examines the percentage of organizations that interact and cooperate with other organizations of differing religious practice.²¹ This chart seems to indicate that 10% of the total organizations surveyed had at least some interaction with “Non Jewish or Christian” groups including “Bahai; Buddhist; Jain; Muslim; Pagan; Sikh; Sufi; Wican; Zoroastrian [sic].”²² It is curious to note their delineation between “Muslim” and “Sufi” in this instance.

It is also interesting (and problematic) to note the implicit Christian-bias in the researcher’s methodology and contextualization of their study. In the first half of the article, Smith and Pulver give a brief history of the “the rise of religious environmentalism” in the

¹⁹ Angela Smith and Simone Pulver, “Ethics-Based Environmentalism in Practice: Religious-Environmental Organizations in the United States,” *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 13, no. 2 (06, 2009): 151-2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 176.

²² Ibid.

United States.²³ However, this history focuses almost strictly on a mobilizing address in 1990 by Pope John Paul II and the collective grief experienced by Christian ecologists when their religious approaches to environmentalism was not taken seriously by secular-environmentalist organizations.²⁴ There are also repeated references to a 1995 study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in which “biblical Creation” is heralded as American culture’s method by which we express our environmental values.²⁵ Furthermore, some questions presented in the researchers’ survey hold a particular Christian, and especially Protestant, bias as they assume the high importance of “relevant sacred texts” to an average individual’s religious view of environmentalism.²⁶ To be charitable to Smith and Pulver, however, it might be productive to view the nature of these questions as merely a descriptive reality of contemporary American religiosity.

Ultimately, Smith and Pulver’s research is not without merit. The conclusions they drew from their data suggest that religious-environmental organizations (or, at least Jewish and Christian groups) primarily utilize an *ethics-based* environmental rhetoric and approach.²⁷ Thus, if Shellenberger and Nordhaus are correct in their argument that *ethics-based* environmentalism (focusing on broad values like being stewards of the Earth) is superior to *issues-based* environmentalism (focusing on hard facts and figures) at winning new environmental converts, then religious-environmental organizations are primed to lead the revival of the environmental movement of the 21st century. As mentioned previously, Smith and Pulver, nestled in the final

²³ Angela Smith and Simone Pulver, "Ethics-Based Environmentalism in Practice: Religious-Environmental Organizations in the United States," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 13, no. 2 (06, 2009): 148-150.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 148-9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

few sentences of their article (almost as an aside), *do* offer some greatly-appreciated, self-aware critiques of their own work. They state that, future studies “should be broadened to include small, less formally organized groups” and “should also examine the philosophies and strategies specific to organizations who are of other religious affiliations as well.”²⁸

J. Arjan Wardekker, Arthur C. Peterson, and Jeroen P. van der Sluijs conducted a study in 2009 that “explored the Christian voices in the US public debate” at the same time Smith and Pulver conducted their massive study mentioned above.²⁹ Specifically working with Christian faith leaders in the United States, the authors sought to understand the worldviews and ideologies surrounding and influencing the myriad of Christian perspectives on environmental policy. While this study did not address other faith perspectives distinct from Christianity, this research was presented and executed in such a way that its model and methodology could be easily emulated and recreated with any and all faith perspectives and identities in mind. This approach should absolutely be undertaken to correct the historical negligence of researchers to include Muslim voices in their studies.

Moving further in time and continuing the pursuit of a reliable measure of religious environmental organizations in the United States, another study was conducted by a team of researchers in 2012. Stephen Ellingson, Vernon A. Woodley, and Anthony Paik conducted a survey of 63 religious-environmental organizations and situated their study in the context of Smith and Pulver’s 2009 study.³⁰ The authors saw their research as a continuation and replication

²⁸ Angela Smith and Simone Pulver, “Ethics-Based Environmentalism in Practice: Religious-Environmental Organizations in the United States,” *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 13, no. 2 (06, 2009): 170-1.

²⁹ J. Arjan Wardekker, Arthur C. Petersen, and Jeroen P. Van Der Sluijs, “Ethics and Public Perception of Climate Change: Exploring the Christian Voices in the US Public Debate,” *Global Environmental Change* 19, no. 4 (10 2009): 512-21.

³⁰ Stephen Ellingson, Vernon A. Woodley, and Anthony Paik. “The Structure of Religious Environmentalism: Movement Organizations, Interorganizational Networks, and Collective Action.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 2 (06 2012): 266-85.

of Smith and Pulver's work. Once again, however, Muslims and Islamic organizations were left out of this survey. Interestingly, however, this survey did include a small number of Buddhist organizations and "eco-spiritual" groups.³¹

The purpose of this survey was to determine the rate at which religious-environmental organizations traded information and engaged in "joint-action" with each other—particularly with organizations of different faith traditions.³² The results of the study were clear that information exchange between religious-environmental groups is fairly standard when comparing the sharing behavior of similar religious communities versus the sharing behaviors of different faith traditions.³³ However, when it came to "joint-action," or the active involvement of two organizations working together for an intimate event or project, the study found that it was rare for organizations to perform with unfamiliar or dissimilar faith perspectives.³⁴ Interfaith organizations were an obviously notable exception to this rule, however, seeing that interfaith cooperation is explicit in their identity.³⁵

While the United States has been quiet on the involvement of Islamic organizations and individuals in the environmental movement, other industrialized nations have not been as far behind the curve. Across the Atlantic, in their 2011 study, Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Mark Bryant published a groundbreaking analysis of British Muslims and their behaviors in urban areas in Great Britain—primarily England.³⁶ The study focused primarily on the planting of personal and

³¹ Stephen Ellingson, Vernon A. Woodley, and Anthony Paik. "The Structure of Religious Environmentalism: Movement Organizations, Interorganizational Networks, and Collective Action." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 2 (06 2012): 275.

³² *Ibid.*, 267.

³³ *Ibid.*, 282.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 283.

³⁶ Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Mark Bryant, "Are British Muslims 'Green'? An Overview of Environmental Activism among Muslims in Britain," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 5, no. 3 (09, 2011): 284-306.

community gardens by Muslims and the impact this had on their lived experience of their faith and practice.³⁷ The authors also delve extensively into the history of Islamic environmental organizations in Great Britain and even outlines a list of major, national organizations currently impacting the culture and political-social life of Muslims and non-Muslims in the United Kingdom at large.³⁸ This article presents a wonderful juxtaposition to the lack of research and attention granted to Muslim environmental organizations in the United States and provides a powerful framework for future research in the United States and elsewhere. It should be noted, however, that one explanation for this research being conducted in Great Britain and not in the United States could be the relative percentage of Muslims in each country. Similar to other Western European nations, the United Kingdom as a whole has a considerably higher proportion of Muslims in their general population than the United States. Population differences aside, this article truly sets the stage for important scholarly research and a massive change of approach to Islamic activism. Of course, having a model by which research can be conducted is important; having a moral imperative to research and explore a diverse array of religious traditions and their impact on the environmental conversation is quite another story.

A Moral Imperative

Striving for diversity in our academic circles and scholarly literature should be a paramount goal for anyone involved in the pursuit. Citing the foundational and infamous William James, David Harmon argues that diversity as a broad concept and practical measure is fundamentally important to the structure of physical reality exhibited in biology, ecology,

³⁷ Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Mark Bryant, "Are British Muslims 'Green'? An Overview of Environmental Activism among Muslims in Britain," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 5, no. 3 (09, 2011): 285.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 286-9.

physics, etcetera but also to human society and culture.³⁹ In fact, Harmon reaffirms the notion proposed and expounded by James that the very biological sensory processes that inform our perception of reality and ultimately make us human would not be possible or nearly as developed had we not evolved as a species in a world of diversity.⁴⁰ “Real-world diversity and the structure of the mind exist in a state of reciprocity” and diversity in nature and culture is “the very means through which consciousness operates” for Harmon and James, his forbearer.⁴¹

In our everyday lives, our eyes and minds are bombarded with distinct sensory input—and our minds set about the task to discern one object, animal, or person from another.⁴² This difference hones our mental skills and our adaptability to new objects and scenarios. For Harmon, it is imperative that we retain diversity and difference in our societies. However, Harmon warns that “we soon will reach a momentous threshold, a point of no return beyond which a critical amount of biological and cultural diversity will have been lost.”⁴³ A crisis has arisen that threatens to condemn our species to the curse of sameness—thus stunting the growth and development of not only the biological ecosystems of the Earth but also our individual selves, our collective existence, and our societies.⁴⁴ Harmon mentions explicitly the need for diversity of languages, cultural systems, “kinship systems,” and religions.⁴⁵ All of these aspects of human society and social structure are integral in how humans interact and organize. The diversity present in each category allows for a beautiful mosaic of perspectives and

³⁹ David Harmon, “On the Meaning and Moral Imperative of Diversity,” in *On Biocultural Diversity: Linking Language, Knowledge, and the Environment*, ed. Luisa Maffi (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001): 52-70.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

knowledges—each connected and granting to the other an infinite number of discrete ideas unknowable or unthinkable by the other acting alone.

For Harmon, the preservation of diversity in all aspects of reality is not merely a practical, scientific imperative, but a moral one as well. He writes, “the moral imperative for preserving diversity is not just the continuance of humankind but the safekeeping of the biocultural evolutionary process that produced us and every other species and brought us to where we are—together.”⁴⁶ So far, the crisis currently reducing our biocultural diversity has claimed countless “lives” —languages, religions, ideas, species, ecosystems. It is our duty to make spaces where this diversity can thrive in all areas of our lived reality.

A Quick Glimpse at Green Muslims

Founded in 2007, Green Muslims is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based out of Washington, D.C. which markets itself as “a source in the Muslim community for spiritually-inspired environmental education, reflection and action.”⁴⁷ The organization’s primary presence exists as an online website adorned with nothing explicitly Islamic aside from a subtle grey and black banner depicting a faint Islamic geometric pattern. Aside from design assets, Green Muslims features tabs across a header displaying the various educational services the organization provides. Green Muslims appears to be focused on three major areas when it comes to their community programs—all of which are listed under their “Programs” tab on their website: “building and sharing knowledge,” “community action” and “capacity building and leadership development.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ David Harmon, “On the Meaning and Moral Imperative of Diversity,” in *On Biocultural Diversity: Linking Language, Knowledge, and the Environment*, ed. Luisa Maffi (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001): 65.

⁴⁷ <http://www.greenmuslims.org/about/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.greenmuslims.org/programs/>

Building and sharing knowledge consists of regular religious education programs highlighting Islamic perspectives on environmentalism sourced from the Qur'an (using a variety of interpretations) and Hadith. This category also contains links to the Green Muslims resource tab—a space where the organization has created a “tool kit” for creating a “greener Ramadan” in a Muslim environmentalist's community.⁴⁹ In conjunction, the “Green Scripture Project” is yet another featured project—this campaign marketing itself as “a community-powered curated collection of readings on faith and the environment from the Islamic tradition [sic].”⁵⁰ The Green Scripture Project links users to a discussion board wherein individuals may post scriptures and engage in dialogue regarding the environmental impact and applicability of the shared quote.⁵¹

Under the banner of community action and capacity building, Green Muslims advertises the many community volunteerism projects they have embarked upon.⁵² According to their website, the organization has participated in “farm work days, planting trees, [and] park and river clean ups” to “create a space where Muslims can learn about what it means to be a steward of the Earth by action.”⁵³ As a highlighted service, this section links users to the Green Muslims' “Zero Trash Kit,” a rentable set of plates, cutlery, and cups for parties, picnics, potlucks, and workshops made available to anyone for a marginal fee.⁵⁴ This service is an attempt to prevent community members from purchasing single-use plastic items for their gatherings—supporting the desire of Green Muslims to create, as mentioned above, a “greener Ramadan.”⁵⁵

⁴⁹ <http://www.greenmuslims.org/programs/>

⁵⁰ <http://www.greenmuslims.org/greenscripture/>

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² <http://www.greenmuslims.org/programs/>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ <http://www.greenmuslims.org/programs/zero-trash-kit/>

⁵⁵ <http://www.greenmuslims.org/programs/>

Finally, capacity building and leadership development reflects Green Muslims' commitment to educating and partnering with other Muslim organizations to promote environmentally conscious and sustainable practices. Green Muslims offers "one-on-one consulting to community leaders, imams, mosque executive boards, Muslim Student Associations, youth, and others" to foster green practices in local communities. Through this program, Green Muslims has partnered with a myriad of other national and local organizations, including Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and Interfaith Youth Corps.⁵⁶

The two most prominent aspects of the service Green Muslims provides on their website are their community blog and the "Resources" tab in the navigation banner. The community blog contains articles by staff, volunteers, and other community members related to recent events, successes of local communities, struggles of local communities, and much more related to Green Muslims mission. The "Resources" tab contains a lengthy list of supportive documents to assist local communities and community leaders to make their communities sustainable. Documents available include a "Khutbah Guide," a "Ramadan Toolkit," a "No Impact Guide," a "Green Iftar Guide," and many others—including links to multimedia resources like films and comic strips.⁵⁷

The environmentally-focused, Islamic organizations in the United States are not limited to hyper-focused communities whose sole mission is environmental sustainability. In fact, those groups are in the minority. The majority of organizations in the United States that practice some level of environmental awareness are general those which have broad mission statements that cover a variety of social and political factors. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), for instance, is one such organization. ISNA's mission covers a vast array of objectives as the

⁵⁶ <http://www.greenmuslims.org/programs/>

⁵⁷ <http://www.greenmuslims.org/resources/>

organization seeks “to foster the development of the Muslim community, interfaith relations, civic engagement, and better understanding of Islam.”⁵⁸

Ultimately, there are a wealth of resources for researchers interested in studying Islamic environmental organizations in the United States—my cursory research has merely graced the surface of what is truly happening on the ground in communities all over the nation. The two organizations mentioned above have a broad, nationwide reach. This is not the only place to find Islamic environmental activism—small, local communities are doing their part and living their faith in a myriad of ways that deserve the time and effort to be studied.

Conclusion: Where Do We Go from Here?

It is an unfortunate reality that the bulk of scholarly work engaged in documentation, assessment, and analysis of religious environmental organizations in the United States has fundamentally left Islamic organizations and Muslim community efforts out of the equation. One could easily justify this practice based on sheer population statistics, but the demographics of the United States are changing and the numbers of Muslims of all varieties—native-born, converts, and immigrants—are increasing dramatically. Muslims will continue to have a profound impact on the United States as they have for centuries—though their influence today is much more visible in contemporary society. Muslims must be represented in the literature no matter how large or small their demographics may be—but soon, researchers and academics will have no ability to ignore this important minority group any longer. We will be all the better for it.

Diversity of life—culture, language, politics, religion, etcetera—is of the utmost importance to the development and continuation of our species and our communal relations on

⁵⁸ <http://www.isna.net/about/>

this planet. Our academic work should reflect this by spending time and resources to represent each dimension of the human condition and our collective existence—as well as the biodiversity of the globe proper. The social and political life of the United States holds specific relevance to our life in this country—all perspectives and approaches should be given time and space to be reflected upon and absorbed.

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